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CHINESE AND JAPANESE IMMIGRANTS— A COMPARISON

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If an off-hand comment on the more obvious facts of Chinese and Japanese immigration as they strike the average Californian is considered a sufficient response to the request of the editor of *THE ANNALS* for an article on this subject, it must be because precisely this off-hand view is one of the essential factors in any race problem.

It must always be remembered that the white American's standard of judging strange peoples is personal and unobjective. The average southern white man, for instance, is most favorably disposed toward a type of Negro objectively inferior,—the type, namely, which best fits the inferior status which the white man prefers the black man to occupy. In a part of California very familiar to the writer, there is a large Armenian and a large Russian immigration. The Armenian, who is generally a superior person, is unpopular because his success is for himself, in his own business. The Russian peasant, who is often an inferior person, is popular because his labor is useful to us, in our business. The same standard of judgment is applied to the Chinese and Japanese. Pinned down to an objective judgment of the races as such, the Californian would doubtless place the Japanese in the higher rank. He judges the Chinese by their coolie class, and regards them as an inferior race. But it is almost impossible to get the Californian to look at the question thus objectively. Ask the question, "Which race is superior?" and you get the subjective answer, "I find the Chinese more useful to me, in my business." Also, the American business man insists on judging men by business standards. The Chinese virtues are business virtues and the Japanese faults are business faults. Therefore, the Chinese are judged by their virtues and the Japanese by their faults.

Taking for the moment this biased viewpoint, we find the Chinese fitting much better than the Japanese into the status which the

white American prefers them both to occupy—that of biped domestic animals in the white man's service. The Chinese coolie is the ideal industrial machine, the perfect human ox. He will transform less food into more work, with less administrative friction, than any other creature. Even now, when the scarcity of Chinese labor and the consequent rise in wages have eliminated the question of cheapness, the Chinese have still the advantage over all other servile labor in convenience and efficiency. They are patient, docile, industrious, and above all "honest" in the business sense that they keep their contracts. Also, they cost nothing but money. Any other sort of labor costs human effort and worry, in addition to the money. But Chinese labor can be bought like any other commodity, at so much a dozen or a hundred. The Chinese contractor delivers the agreed number of men, at the agreed time and place, for the agreed price, and if any one should drop out he finds another in his place. The men board and lodge themselves, and when the work is done they disappear from the employer's ken until again needed. The entire transaction consists in paying the Chinese contractor an agreed number of dollars for an agreed result. This elimination of the human element reduces the labor problem to something the employer can understand. The Chinese labor-machine, from his standpoint, is perfect.

But there are, of course, the additional standpoints of the merchant and the white laboring man. To the merchant the chief function of humanity is to "keep the money at home" and in circulation. The Chinaman spends his money with his own merchants, for Chinese goods, or sends it back to China directly. Therefore he is not a mercantile asset. In the old days, when the Chinese were sufficiently numerous and cheap to be real competitors, there was of course a violent labor-union opposition to them, most of which is now diverted to the Japanese, as the more immediate menace.

But all this is academic and historical. The Chinese are a disappearing problem. Most of those still remaining in America are old men. The few born in this country, and the more numerous ones smuggled in, are only a handful, and there are not now in California enough Chinese to do more than a small part of the servile labor which our transitional industrial condition could absorb. So long as California undertakes to do intensive farming on large estates, with a small population, so long will there be a demand for

much more farm labor, at certain seasons, than the local industries can support or the local population absorb during the remainder of the year. Fortunately, there is a harvest of some sort going on in some part of California almost every month in the year, so that it is only necessary to organize the migration of this temporary labor to keep it continuously occupied. The problem of meeting this condition with organized white labor is difficult and has not yet been solved. Meantime, the Chinese have met ideally the requirements of the employing white farmer. But there are not enough of them left, and in their search for a substitute the farmers have turned to the Japanese.

The Japanese are a very different people. As laborers they are less patient but quicker and brighter than the Chinese. In certain industries, particularly the thinning of sugar beets and the picking of raisin grapes, their short legs and ability to squat make them the most efficient workers in existence. A white man's efficiency is reduced very greatly when he has to squat. A Japanese can do as much work squatting as standing. Under the stimulus of "piece work," the Japanese work rapidly, but not carefully.

These differences, however, are minor. The one overshadowing contrast is this: The Chinese will keep a contract; the Japanese will not. Chinese business, like American business, is based on the assumption of the inviolability of contracts. Therefore the American and the Chinese can understand each other, on this point. But the Japanese seems to have no comprehension of the contract as a fundamental obligation, while the American cannot understand how a man can have any virtue who lacks this one. The Japanese contractor buys the fruit on the trees, as the Chinese used to do. The price goes down, and he refuses to understand how he could be bound by an agreement which has now ceased to be profitable. Japanese grape-pickers agree to pick a crop at a certain price. When the work is half done, there comes a chance to get a higher price elsewhere and they all decamp. There comes a sudden threat of rain in the drying season, and the trays must be "stacked" at once or the crop will be irreparably damaged. Instantly the cost of Japanese labor rises to blackmail prices, regardless of previous contracts. Of course there is such recourse as the law gives, but that is very little on a labor contract, and, generally, no legal obligation is worth much in business unless it is recognized also as a moral obligation. The Japanese does not recognize a contract as a moral

obligation, and the American therefore assumes that he has no sense of any moral obligation. In an industrial system based on contract the Japanese must acquire a new sort of conscience, or he will remain an industrial misfit.

This of course is only the narrowly industrial view, chiefly that of the employing farmer. Socially, it is necessary to consider both the actual condition produced by the presence of Chinese and Japanese in moderate numbers, and the possible condition which would result if the bars were thrown down to the free immigration of either.

The Chinese live both by preference and by compulsion in "Chinatown," where they conduct their own affairs, independently of our laws and government, much as they do in China.

Adjoining Chinatown is usually the "tenderloin," and the whole district is the plague-spot of a California city. There is no law in Chinatown. The slave traffic is open and notorious, and slave pens, with bought slave girls peering through the barred windows, are a familiar sight. The most respected occupations of the leading Chinese citizens are gambling and lottery. As the laboring Chinese have become fewer, older and poorer, the games have turned to white men and Japanese for their victims. The Japanese rarely run gambling houses, but they are the chief frequenters of them, and lose much money. Chinese lotteries hold drawings twice a day, and tickets can be bought as cheaply as ten cents. Sometimes one small city will support a dozen lotteries. The tickets are peddled secretly, by the Chinese and by white cigar dealers and others, to American men and boys. In Chinatown the opium den or "hop joint" flourishes, and the opium-smoking white men who infest Chinatown are the dregs of creation. The governing bodies of Chinatown are the rival companies or "tongs," which enforce their decrees and settle their feuds by murder. There is a caste of professional hired murderers, or "highbinders," who are the executive arm of this peculiar government. The writer has seen the bodies of dead highbinders, after a tong war, stripped of actual chain armor, knife-proof and hatchet-proof. Chinese are sometimes convicted of murder, but there is never any telling whether you have convicted the right man. The Chinese whose word in a business obligation would be as good as a government bond, will perjure himself unblushingly on the witness stand. The jury-box estimate of Chinese testimony is that no Chinaman can be believed under oath. Chinese gambling

joints are actual fortresses, with steel doors, sentries, and a labyrinth of secret exits. They are an open, fortified defiance of law, and are a source of almost universal police graft. An honest "Chinatown squad" is an iridescent dream. Sanitary conditions are unspeakable and sanitary regulations are unenforceable. Religion is represented by joss houses, where the coolie worshipper seeks which god will most cheaply grant his prayer for a winning lottery ticket.

There are decent men in Chinatown, but no moral leaders, and no civic sentiment, to enforce any moral obligations but business ones. These are absolute, and every Chinese pays all his debts by the time of the annual New Year festivities. Superstition is universal and gross, and the numerous devils are the only power feared, except the tongs. Dead men are greatly honored, but a dying man is thrust into the dead-house to starve, supplied with opium, but with nothing else. Chinese clothing, food, customs and standards are universal, and a Californian Chinatown is simply a miniature section of Canton, transported bodily. The Chinese are not part of American life, and conform to American standards only in the single respect of recognizing the obligation of a business contract.

The Japanese in the beginning congregate on the borders of Chinatown, but they build better and cleaner houses and admit some air to them. They adopt American clothing at once, and American customs very rapidly. As they grow in numbers and prosperity, they provide themselves with recreation—good and bad. They go to the Chinese gambling houses and to the Buddhist temples and Christian missions. Pool and billiard rooms, with their good and bad points, are liberally patronized. The general aspect of life is cheerful and attractive, and the Japanese themselves, from the highest to the lowest, are a delightfully polite and genial people. Even the "cockyness" that has followed the Russian war has not obliterated their personal likableness. In every relation but a business one they are charming. They develop a civic sense, public spirit, and moral leadership. When the Chinese gambling joints debauch the Japanese young men, the Buddhist priest, the Christian missionary and the president of the Japanese Reform Association call on the mayor to protest. But when asked whether the Japanese houses of prostitution should not be suppressed also, they shake their heads. Prostitution is a most characteristic Japanese industry,

and there appears to be no moral sentiment against it. The women themselves are under less social ostracism than the women of corresponding class of other races, and they appear also to be less personally degraded. You see no obscene pictures and no flaunting of vulgarity in a Japanese house of prostitution. In some places, these facts are giving the Japanese an approximate monopoly of this evil.

But the Japanese do not confine themselves to "Japtown," nor permit the white man to determine the limits of their residence. They buy up town and country property, and wherever they settle the white man moves out. In Sacramento they have completely occupied what was formerly one of the best business districts. The process is simple. A Japanese buys a fine corner location, paying for it whatever price he must. Then he gets all the rest of the block very cheaply, for the white owners and tenants will not stay. In the country, wherever the Japanese rent or buy land in any quantities, white men evacuate. The Vaca Valley, one of the richest and most beautiful spots in California, is the most notable example. Similiar beginnings have been made elsewhere. In business they do not confine themselves to their own people. In Fowler, California, for instance, one of the leading department stores, doing a general business with Americans, is owned by Sumida Bros. In San Francisco there is a Japanese daily newspaper, with a modern plant and a large circulation and business. It was the first newspaper in San Francisco to resume publication with its own building and plant after the fire.

The Japanese are energetic, versatile and adaptable. Many of them attend the high schools and universities, to secure a first-class American education. These students frequently work, after hours, as house servants in American families, partly to support themselves and partly to supplement their American academic education with an American domestic education. As servants they are intelligent, accommodating, competent and unstable. As in everything else, their one weakness is their failure to recognize the obligation of a contract. They will leave, without notice or consideration, on the slightest provocation. Chinese servants, such of them as there are left, are more generally professional servants, who make the work a permanent business, and expect high wages.

Magnify these conditions indefinitely, and it is not hard to foresee the result of any general admission of immigrants of either

race. Chinese will not assimilate with American life, and Americans refuse to assimilate with Japanese. The great danger of the "yellow peril" is its enormous size. With less than two million white men in California, and more than four hundred million Chinese in China, just across the way, the very smallest overflow from that limitless reservoir would swamp our Pacific Coast. If it is impossible for two million white men, in an American state, to enforce American laws on a dwindling few thousand Chinese, American institutions would be simply obliterated by any considerable influx of Chinese. A very few years of unrestricted Chinese immigration would leave California, American only in the sense in which Hongkong is English. Fortunately, on this question, American policy is fixed, and is for the present in our hands. China is powerless to protest, whether we deal justly or unjustly, and the dwindling remnant of Chinese present few occasions for personal or diplomatic friction. The Chinese problem is easy, so long as our present policy continues. Under any other policy, it would straightway overwhelm us. No possible immediate industrial demand could justify letting down the bars to Chinese immigration in even the slightest degree. Those industries which cannot be developed and those resources which cannot be exploited without Chinese labor must simply be left undeveloped and unexploited—unless we are willing to sacrifice American civilization permanently to industrial exploitation temporarily, on the whole Pacific Coast.

The Chinese problem is approaching its end, unless we reopen it. The Japanese problem is only beginning, and the end is not wholly within our control. For the present, there are no more Japanese in the country than we can safely utilize, and the number, under the restrictive policy of Japan, appears to be decreasing. This is excellent, so long as it lasts. But it can last, in peace and amity, only so long as Japan wills, and Japanese sensitiveness constantly tends to magnify the smallest provocations into international issues. Industrially, we can utilize some Japanese, but internationally we cannot guarantee even one Japanese against the possible chances of American hoodlumism. With the issue, not probably of peace (for war is the remotest of contingencies), but of amity in the hands of any rowdy boy who chooses to smash a Japanese window, the present Japanese exclusion arrangement is in the unstableness of equilibrium. A momentary wave of demagoguery, in

Japanese politics, a chance street fight in the San Francisco slums, and the whole agreement might be jeopardized. Then we should be forced to the alternative of Japanese exclusion by our own initiative, with all its difficulties and possibilities of complication.

But let no American who realizes what it would mean to the South to turn back the wheels of history and decree that there should never have been a race problem there, consider for a moment the possibility of importing another and harder one on our Pacific Coast. There is no right way to solve a race problem except to stop it before it begins. Every possible solution of the Negro problem is a wrong one, but we can at least let each generation determine which wrong it will commit, and take the consequences, with respect to that permanently impossible problem. No such possibility opens with respect to a race problem where the other race would determine its own view of its own rights, and be backed by a powerful and jealous nation in maintaining them. The Pacific Coast is the frontier of the white man's world, the culmination of the westward migration which is the white man's whole history. It will remain the frontier so long as we guard it as such; no longer. Unless it is maintained there, there is no other line at which it can be maintained without more effort than American government and American civilization are able to sustain. The multitudes of Asia are already awake, after their long sleep, as the multitudes of Europe were when our present flood of continental immigration began. We know what could happen, on the Asiatic side, by what did happen and is happening on the European side. On that side we have survived, and such of the immigration as we have not assimilated for the present we know is assimilable in the future. But against Asiatic immigration we could not survive. The numbers who would come would be greater than we could encyst, and the races who would come are those which we could never absorb. The permanence not merely of American civilization, but of the white race on this continent, depends on our not doing, on the Pacific side, what we have done on the Atlantic Coast. For the present, the situation as to both Chinese and Japanese immigration is satisfactory. But to relax the present policy, even for a brief interval, would be to load ourselves with a burden which all eternity could not again throw off and all our vitality could not withstand. There is no other possible national menace at all to be compared with this.